

Rescue Archaeology

Foundations for the future

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with

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Editorial foreword

Paul Everill

This book was conceived in the run-up to the 40th anniversary of the founding of RESCUE, when the discussion among council members was focused on the best way to commemorate this landmark while also emphasising the continued relevance of the organisation. It seemed to me then, and remains the case, that a successor to the RESCUE volume of 1974, edited by Philip Rahtz, was the perfect way to do both.

The 1974 book was as much a summary of the current state of the discipline as it was a statement of intent, and a banner that drew in a whole generation of professionals, practitioners and talented amateurs to the cause of protection for the historic environment. Appearing three years after RESCUE was formed, the energy of the founding members had already transformed the government approach to archaeology (particularly in terms of funding) and the book was able to trumpet their collaborative achievements, while identifying the on-going causes of concern. In some respects the book was published at a high point for RESCUE, and the years that followed saw the emergence of new professional standards and the management of archaeology as the principal tool by which the historic environment could be protected. The 1970s and early 1980s also witnessed the developing schism between academic and developer-led archaeologists; between unit managers and diggers; and between advocates of the new single context recording system and the more traditional approaches. The disciplinary shift towards focusing on the management of the archaeological process, supported ultimately by the embedding of the discipline within the planning system after 1990, could be interpreted as a victory for the profession and the fulfilment of its original 1970s manifesto, indeed many archaeologists might have begun to wonder if there was still a need for an organisation like RESCUE. However, bodies such as the Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA), Council for British Archaeology (CBA), and Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) and even Historic England, Cadw and Historic Scotland to some extent have had to be reactive organisations for the most part, finding ways of implementing policy through standards and guidance documents, rather than campaigning for wholesale changes to approach and policy in order to better protect the historic environment. The need for a body like RESCUE has never, in reality, waned. Today the need is perhaps greater than

it has been since the late-1970s, as the governmental response to economic crises has been to make swingeing harvests of the low-hanging fruit of heritage protection at local and national level, while shifting the 24 year old emphasis in planning advice from the preservation of the historic environment, towards an emphasis on removing obstacles to (re)development. Viewed in conjunction with age-old issues like pay and conditions of employment within professional archaeology, which in part result from the poorly conceived competitive marketplace into which archaeology was thrust; the sea-change in the way that Higher Education is funded (and with it the threats to Departments of Archaeology and consequently the training of future professionals) there is currently a perfect storm that threatens to leave the discipline in tatters.

Even ten years ago, an anniversary publication of this kind would have been a far more straightforward affair, but in proposing it towards the beginning of 2010 no-one but the prescient could have foreseen the full impact of the coalition Government's austerity drive on all aspects of our lives, not just the historic environment. In producing this book, we have seen chapters overtaken by events and revised on more than one occasion as we worked hard to produce something that was as up-to-date as possible. This would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of all involved. This foreword would be incomplete without thanking Pam Irving, my co-editor, who has managed the production of this RESCUE publication with great skill, and the Section Editors Joe Flatman; Tony Howe; and Reuben Thorpe who have all devoted their valuable time, energy and expertise to this endeavour. I must also thank RESCUE council for their continued faith in us and the John and Ruth Howard Charitable Trust for their funding. However, particular thanks also go to our authors. Their chapters represent a snapshot of British archaeology as it is now. Many were inspired by the sight of the 1974 book on their shelves, and the prospect of contributing to something that might still inspire others in 40 years' time. Their patience, as we negotiated the rapid and unpredictable changes affecting the discipline, has been key to bringing this project to fruition.

The original Rahtz volume was conceived and produced at a time of great concern, a low point for the discipline, but perhaps also present in those pages was great optimism as things were, tangibly, just starting to improve. This current volume may have started life as a 40th anniversary project, but since its conception the rapidly shifting sands on which the discipline is built have affected all of us. However, these moving targets have also dramatically underscored the need for a successor to the Rahtz volume. A clarion call and banner to which all those who seek to preserve our historic environment can rally as the discipline faces a return to the darkest days we have seen since the 1970s.